and a little water, drawing on the hidden support of his countrymen, unafraid to flee when the battle was not in his favour, choosing his ground and his time for attack, was more than a match for any regular army, no matter what its strength. Kitchener's policy of retaliation, with its farm-burning, concentration camps, and collective punishment, was as ineffective as a similar policy employed in Vietnam sixty-five years later.

The political importance of the war was underestimated; only now are its errors and tragedies reaching full realisation. And despite the swarms of war correspondents—and military observers from nearly every major power in the world—the main military lessons of the war went unnoticed. The British soldier learned the value of accurate rifle fire, but the only conclusions drawn from the Boers' use of trenches proved to be false ones. James Barnes, an American war correspondent, saw the truth: that trenches too long to be outflanked would lead to stalemate. But he thought this too obvious a point to drive home, and he wrote with certainty that trench warfare was "a thing of the past except in wooded country or where all preliminary movements are concealed." Events were soon to prove how wrong he was.

Assessment of censorship
- context of war

The truth about has censored by th
british (1991) - Uriel Connett.
- panoptic

Boer.
1st WW.
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Second WW.
- Falklands
IRA.

THE LAST WAR 1914–1918

This, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war—it is the last war!

—H. G. Wells in *The War That Will End War*

The last war, during the years of 1915, 1916, 1917 was the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth. Any writer who said otherwise lied. So the writers either wrote propaganda, shut up, or fought.

—Ernest Hemingway in *Men at War*

1997/98

MC104 wk 3

Philip Knightley

The First Casualty

London, Pan books.

The First World War was like no other war before or since. It began with the promise of splendour, honour, and glory. It ended as a genocidal conflict on an unparalleled scale, a meaningless act of slaughter that continued until a state of exhaustion set in because no one knew how to stop it.

At first, the sacrifices, which all wars demand, were offered only too willingly. "My only regret is that the opportunity has been denied me to repay you for the lavish kindness and devotedness which you have always shown me," Lieutenant Glyn Morgan wrote to his father two days before he was killed in action. "Now, however, it may be that I have done so in the struggle between Life and Death, between England and Germany, Liberty and Slavery. In any case, I shall have done my duty in my little way . . . goodbye dearest of fathers." Walter Limmer, a student from Leipzig, later to die of wounds, wrote to his mother: "This hour is one such as seldom strikes in the life of a nation and it is so marvellous and moving as to be in itself sufficient compensation for many sufferings and sacrifices."[1]

But when the generals, commanding larger armies than the world had ever seen before, could find no way of using them except as fodder for the machine guns, a mood of disillusion with the pointlessness of it all set in. Siegfried Sassoon, in his poem "The General," expressed it perhaps best of all.

"Good morning; Good morning!" the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
"He's a cheery old card," grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.
. . . . . .
But he did for them both by his plan of attack.[2]

To enable the war to go on, the people had to be steeled for further sacrifices, and this could not be done if the full story of what was happening on the Western Front was known. And so began a great conspiracy. More deliberate lies were told than in any other period of history, and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the truth.

In Britain, under the Defence of the Realm Act, a system of censorship was created so severe that its legacy lingers today.* The willingness of newspaper proprietors to accept this control and their co-operation in disseminating propaganda brought them the rewards of social rank and political power. But it also undermined public faith in the press.

A large share of the blame for this must rest with the British war correspondents. They were in a position to know more than most men of the nature of the war of attrition on the Western Front, yet they identified themselves absolutely with the armies in the field; they protected the high command from criticism, wrote jauntily about life in the trenches, kept an inspired silence about the slaughter, and allowed themselves to be absorbed by the propaganda machine. Some of them had sufficient decency to feel shame at the way they were discrediting their craft, and when the post-war revulsion set in, one of them, Sir Philip Gibbs (who had been knighted for his services), was able to look back and attempt an explanation. "Nobody believed us. Though some of us wrote the truth from the first to the last—*apart from the naked realism of horrors and losses, and criticism of the facts,* which did not come within the liberty of our pen [emphasis added]."[3]

Perhaps the war correspondents of the First World War were to be pitied. Propaganda dates back 2,400 years, to Sun-tzu's *The Art of War,* but the First World War saw its first use in an organised, scientific manner. War correspondents were among its first victims.

For several weeks before the outbreak of war in August 1914, Britain's attention had been fixed on the Irish troubles. To the ordinary Englishman, apathetic to the Continent for two generations, the rumblings across the Channel passed almost unnoticed. Even among the men of power, aware of what was happening, there was a strong section of opinion bitterly against Britain's being dragged into a European conflict. The financier Lord Rothschild told *The Times'* city editor that he was "hounding the country into war." The Free Churches passed an anti-war resolution. The professors and Fellows of Cambridge signed a petition in favour of neutrality. The *Manchester Guardian* carried a full-page advertisement announcing the formation of a league to stop war, and there was a huge anti-war demonstration in Trafalgar Square. Bishops, mayors, and businessmen signed manifestoes urging Britain to keep out. The *Manchester Guardian,* the *Labour Leader,* the *Daily News,* and citizens of the stature of Ramsay MacDonald, Keir Hardie, Thomas Hardy, and Gilbert Murray all protested against Britain's being involved in a European war. When the Cabinet had its way and war was declared on August 4, liberal and nonconformist England demanded a moral reason for fighting. The government suddenly had to face the fact that it lacked that most essential element for successfully waging war: the wholehearted support of the nation. What could be done about it?

The professional army posed no difficulty—apart from switching the

* The government can examine incoming and outgoing cables and can censor newspapers.

minds of the service chiefs to thinking of Germany as the enemy instead of France! But the civilians, who would have to supply recruits for the front and for the war industries, who would have to bear the sacrifices of war without complaints that might spread dissension and discouragement—how could they be united behind the war effort? From a faltering start, with a series of appeals to purely nationalistic interests, a propaganda machine developed that became the envy of the world. Beginning with a Parliamentary War Aims Committee and a small department at Wellington House in the office of the Insurance Commissioners—financed from revenue for "HM Foreign and Other Secret Services"—Britain by the end of the war had created a propaganda organisation that became the model on which Goebbels based that of the Germans some twenty years later.

The Germans never recovered from their initial set-back, were never able to efface the impression that they were the aggressors, were never able to popularise so striking an epithet as "Hun" or "Boche," and throughout the war referred bitterly to the Allies as "the All-Lies," to Reuters as "the fabricator of War Lies," and to Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* and the director of propaganda in enemy countries, as "the Minister of Lying." The Germans were particularly inept at handling "human interest" cases, like that of Edith Cavell, a matron at a hospital in Brussels. When they executed her on October 12, 1915, they handed the Allies a ready-made atrocity story—"cold-blooded murder . . . poor English girl shot for housing refugees . . . the greatest crime in history"[4]—which was sent all over the world. Yet the Germans could have quite justifiably presented Miss Cavell as an enemy citizen who had freely confessed to helping Allied servicemen to escape under cover of her mission as a nurse, an act she knew to be punishable by death. The French had *already* shot one woman for exactly the same offence and were to shoot another eight for other capital offences before the end of the war. Given German bungling of this degree, there was more than enough material for the campaign to mobilise the animosity of Englishmen against Germany and thus to weld the nation into a fighting whole.

The war was made to appear one of defence against a menacing aggressor. The Kaiser was painted as a beast in human form. (In a single report on September 22, 1914, the *Daily Mail* succeeded in referring to him as a "lunatic," a "barbarian," a "madman," a "monster," a "modern judas," and a "criminal monarch.") The Germans were portrayed as only slightly better than the hordes of Genghis Khan, rapers of nuns, mutilators of children, and destroyers of civilisation. Once the commitment to war had been made, an overwhelming majority of the nation's political and intellectual leaders joined this propaganda campaign. Prime Minister Asquith, using the technique of atrocity confirmation by sweeping generalisation, told the House of Commons, on April 27, 1915, "We shall not forget this horrible record of calculated cruelty and crime." Bonar Law, the Colonial Secretary, referring to British patriotism, told an American correspondent, "It is as well to have it properly stirred by German frightfulness." Northcliffe told his editors, "The Allies must never be tired of insisting that they were the victims of a deliberate aggression." Even liberals swung behind the war. H. G. Wells decided that war was inevitable because of the wickedness of Germany, but that out of war would spring a lasting peace. This led him to coin the phrase "the war that will end war," which was to haunt him for the rest of his life.*

In their sweep through Belgium, the Germans caused the deaths of some 5,000 civilians.† The Allies set out to turn this into a deliberate campaign of terror, torture, sacrilege, and barbarism. The Bureau de la Presse, which controlled war news in France, and which had been financed at the outbreak of war with 25 million gold francs from secret-service funds, disseminated atrocity stories at such a rate that the French press ceased to put individual headings on them and simply ran them week after week under the same headline: LES ATROCITÉS ALLEMANDES.

British newspapers lent their prestige to the campaign. The *Financial News,* in what now seems an unbelievable editorial, said on June 10, 1915, that the Kaiser had ordered German airmen to make special efforts to kill King Albert's children, that double rewards were paid to German submarine crews for sinking ships carrying women and children, and that the Kaiser had personally ordered the torturing of three-year-old children, specifying the tortures to be inflicted.‡

A committee of lawyers and historians under the chairmanship of Lord Bryce, a former ambassador to the United States, produced a report, which was translated into thirty languages, in which it was stated that the Germans had systematically murdered, outraged, and violated innocent men, women, and children in Belgium. "Murder, lust, and pillage," the report said, "prevailed over many parts of Belgium on a scale unparalleled in any war between civilised nations during the last three centuries." The report gave titillating details of how German officers and men had publicly raped twenty Belgian girls in the market place at Liège, how eight German soldiers had bayoneted a two-year-old child, and how another had sliced off a peasant girl's breasts in Malines. Bryce's signature added considerable weight to the report, and it was not until after the war that several unsatisfactory aspects of the Bryce committee's activities emerged. The committee

* A few maintained an anti-war stance, at considerable cost. Bertrand Russell was dismissed from his post as a lecturer in mathematics at Cambridge, was deprived of his passport and prevented from addressing public meetings, and spent six months in gaol for writing a seditious article.

† They were shot as guerrilla fighters, as hostages, or simply because they got in the way of a victorious advancing army in which not every soldier was a saint.

‡ Hardly more believable was the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of December 1, 1914, which said that Gurkha and Sikh troops liked to sneak across the lines at night to slit German throats and drink the blood.

sumption was issued at a twice-weekly press conference between one GHQ staff officer and journalists. The items for this conference might theoretically have been vetted by six different censors and fifteen other bureaux, and the officer in charge followed standing instructions that included this stricture: "It is not so much the accuracy of news as its effect that matters." Germany did, however, rapidly evolve its own agency to report army operations for consumption abroad and had the admirable cheek to offer the reports on a subscriber basis to *The Times*. (This was before they began to be broadcast daily.) All these activities came under the Kriegpresseamt, the war press office, which in turn was under the direct control of the general staff. This office prepared and distributed periodicals, sponsored the production of pamphlets and books, co-ordinated censorship, and expanded the network of OKBs, or officer correspondents, who provided flesh for the basic military communiqués. So the only source of information for the German public was official. No criticism of the conduct of the war was permitted, and editors were told not only what facts could be printed, but also what views could be expressed on them.[9]

In Britain, it soon became clear that the British general staff had similar ideas on the role of the press. Censorship had been imposed on August 2, 1914, and Kitchener's only concession to informing the public about the military situation was to appoint an officer, Colonel Sir Ernest Swinton, to the staff of the commander-in-chief to write reports on the progress of the war. These, after being vetted by several generals and Kitchener himself, were released to the press under the by-line "Eye-witness." One editor is reported to have remarked, after reading Swinton's first, heavily censored dispatch, "Eye-wash would have been a better pseudonym."*

Swinton, a Royal Engineer, who had written two books before the war under the pseudonym "Ole Luk-Oie," did his best, but the aims he had set himself were, in order of importance: avoid helping the enemy; mislead him where possible; and tell the public only as much of the truth as is compatible with safety. How inadequate the resulting reports were is best demonstrated by quoting briefly from one of them, dated September 18, 1914. It describes the beginning of trench warfare on the Aisne.

> . . . It may be said that along the greater part of our front the Germans have been driven back from the forward slopes on the north of the river. Their infantry are holding strong lines of trenches amongst and along the edges of the numerous woods which crown these slopes. These trenches are elaborately constructed. . . . Where our men are holding the forward edges of the high ground on the north side they are now strongly entrenched. They are well fed and in spite of the wet weather of the past week are cheerful and confident.

This was hardly the stuff to satisfy editors, and so they began to try influence, approaching powerful members of the government for help. Churchill, a former war correspondent and now First Lord of the Admiralty, seemed a natural choice, but he turned out to be as immovable as Kitchener: "A warship in action has no room for a journalist," Churchill ruled. Could he influence the army? "The war is going to be fought in a fog. The best place for correspondence about this war will be in London." Hungry for news, and yet faced with accepting the situation or organising an unofficial coverage of the front on their own initiative and risking the consequences, most newspapers decided to take the chance. There was no lack of volunteers to be correspondents. As Philip Gibbs wrote:

> There was a procession of literary adventurers up the steps of the buildings in the Street of Adventure--all those men who get lost somewhere between one war and another and come out with claims of ancient service on the battlefields of Europe when the smell of blood is scented from afar; and scores of new men of sporting instincts and jaunty confidence, eager to be 'in the middle of things', willing to go out on any terms so long as they could see a 'bit of fun', ready to take all risks.[10]

They were rather upset, these literary adventurers, that one of the first scoops of the war, the German invasion of Belgium, had been achieved not by an English correspondent, but by an American free-lance called Granville Fortescue. Fortescue, a soldier of fortune, had been a White House aide in Washington, a military observer in the Russo-Japanese War, an explorer in Venezuela, and a war correspondent in the Riff wars in Morocco for the British newspaper the *Standard*. He was in Belgium, living at Knocke, near Ostend, when war threatened, so he packed his family off to London and sent a telegram to the *Daily Telegraph* offering his services. He got no reply, but decided to go to Brussels to see if he could learn what was happening from the American Embassy. While waiting in the reception room, Fortescue overheard an excited conversation in Flemish between the embassy doorman and his brother. The brother, it appeared, had travelled all night to bring news that German motorcycle troops were already around his farm near Visé, in the eastern province of Liège. Fortescue got to a telephone, called the *Daily Telegraph* in London, identified himself, and filed a story about German scouting units inside Belgian territory. In its issue of August 3, 1914, the *Telegraph* splashed the story under the head-

*The French had a similar system. Each army had attached to it an *officier informateur*, whose job it was to collect all the dramatic episodes after a battle and then write a suitably discreet story for the government to send all over the world.

line COUNTRY INVADED BY GERMAN TROOPS and by-lined it "From our own correspondent, Brussels, Monday." Within hours the *Daily Telegraph* was on to Fortescue at his Brussels hotel with furious reproaches: no other newspaper had the story, and the Foreign Office had denounced it as untrue. Fortescue insisted he was right, but felt that the *Telegraph* did not believe him. Twenty-four hours later the *Telegraph* telephoned Fortescue again, with fulsome apologies, and offered him a contract as a roving war correspondent. Britain had just declared war on Germany for violation of Belgian neutrality. Fortescue's story had given the *Telegraph* a twenty-four-hour world scoop, and the other British papers were rushing men to Europe to try to catch up.

The difficulties were immense. Kitchener had ordered that any correspondent found in the field should be arrested, have his passport taken, and be expelled. The correspondents tried to get around this. *The Times'* man in Paris organised a group of "keen young men" to travel behind the Allied lines. They were well briefed: "Be as inconspicuous as possible . . . go over the ground by train to a certain point, then by bicycle or on foot . . . the principal thing is to keep rigidly away from the English, who take a fiendish delight in arresting war correspondents."[11] They got their material, such as it was, back to London by couriers, who ran a car shuttle service between Paris and Boulogne and, on the other side of the Channel, between Folkstone and London.

Philip Gibbs of the *Daily Chronicle* had been in France since August 2. Gibbs, a small, emotional man, had started his career on the *Daily Graphic,* travelling the war front in Serbia making quick sketches, which were then "worked up" by an artist back in the office. He had, he cheerfully admitted, "an immeasurable ignorance of the meaning of warfare. I knew nothing about its methods and machinery, the immensity and range of its destruction. I thought it would be like the South African affair: remote, picturesque and romantic." He was excited at the chance of becoming a war correspondent, because it seemed at first "the crown of journalistic ambition, the heart of its adventure and romance."[12] He was soon to be disillusioned. Gibbs, who spoke good French, had an authorisation from the French army permitting him to receive in Paris the daily war communiqués. By flashing this and using his charm, he managed to make his way to northern France and across the Belgian border.

Others, usually with less success, were trying to do the same thing. As the Germans stormed across Belgium, their uhlans only an hour or two behind the stampeding population, six other correspondents fought their way onto trains or pushed up roads filled with panic-stricken people. William Beach Thomas, a tall, military-looking man, who was representing the *Daily Mail,* had early success with a *laissez-passer* that he had made himself. It consisted of a mauve-and-gilt invitation card signed by the Mayor of Epernay, the wine magnate Pol Roger. It worked until he reached Hazebrouck, a railway centre in northern France. There his companion, a *Times* correspondent, insisted that they present their credentials to a British lieutenant standing in the town square. The officer became annoyed when the *Times* man, replying to the question "Who are you?," answered, "Chiefly a man of letters, but for the moment a war correspondent," and he rushed them both into gaol, where the *Times* man complained bitterly about the standard of the cuisine.

Geoffrey Pyke, who had been a Reuters correspondent in Copenhagen, persuaded the *Daily Chronicle* to let him try to smuggle himself into Germany. Using a false American passport and posing as a printing-machinery salesman, Pyke travelled via Denmark to Berlin and then spent six days eavesdropping in cafés. Then the police arrested him, threatened to shoot him as a spy, and finally put him in gaol, where he stayed for six months and was then sent to Ruhleben, a civilian internment camp. He managed to escape and walked to Holland, where he cabled his story to London. The *Chronicle* ran it on July 26, 1915—DAILY CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT ESCAPES FROM RUHLEBEN—but the newspaper and Pyke parted company when Pyke said he could not follow this story, as the editor requested him to do, with one on the low state of morale and poor food standards in Germany. That, said Pyke, was simply not true, and he resigned. The full story of his adventures, *To Ruhleben and Back,* was one of the First World War's best sellers.

While the war correspondents were in and out of prison; while "Eyewitness" was reporting on the weather ("fine with less wind, although the nights are now much colder"), the conditions of the troops ("several have received their baptism of fire during the week"), no man's land ("bodies of German infantry are still lying in heaps where they have fallen at different times"), and espionage ("secret agents have been found at rail-heads observing entrainments and detrainments"); and while French newspapers were filled with pages of heroic sentiment but not an item of news, this is what was really happening.

One million French soldiers had advanced in the wrong place to meet one and a half million Germans. While the bulk of the French army had gone to the eastern end of the frontier, Germany's best and largest army had smashed its way through on the west, storming across Belgium and Luxembourg, sweeping all before it.

Four hundred thousand civilians were in flight from Antwerp towards neutral Holland. A quarter of a million were crossing the Scheldt in anything that would float. The roads, railways, and waterways were choked with Belgians running from the dreaded uhlans. One war correspondent managed to capture the terror the nation felt.

After the Russo-Japanese War, Luigi Barzini had covered two Balkan flare-ups and then the Mexican Revolution before *Corriere della Sera* com-

missioned him to go to France. He arrived in Paris on August 20 and found that the Paris-Brussels express was still running. At Hal, ten miles from Brussels, his journey ended.

> I was looking for the war and it came to meet me . . . all of a sudden the train stopped, and a cry was heard, "The Uhlans! The Uhlans!" Massed against a level crossing barrier, a small obscure crowd, which waited for it to open so that they could resume their flight, threw this news to the passengers in the train. . . . In the whirring reflection of an electric lamp we glimpsed anxious and pallid faces, hands nervously gripping the gates. "Where are the Uhlans?" a hundred voices ask. "Three kilometres away. They've shot two cyclists. Open, in the name of God!" The train slowly entered Hal station, but rather than continue towards Brussels, it changed track and headed for the French frontier, crowded with refugees. One old woman cries and howls, "Le Pape est mort." Who knows what connection her simple pious soul finds between the Pope and her country's disaster? She must see a fearful presage in the death of the head of Christianity . . . one thinks with profound anguish of the myriad lives that end at this hour in bloodied Europe, of the nations in agony. . . . The Uhlans enter Hal as we leave. . . . On the main road a procession of fleeing inhabitants silently passes, confused, swift and black, afraid of even being heard. It is the twilight of a world.[13]

Britain was also in trouble, with the retreat from Mons, centre of a mining area in Belgium. Compared with later events in the war, the Mons affair was a skirmish. But the fact remains that the British army was defeated in its first encounter with the Germans, and the Press Bureau's attempts to hide this made the shock doubly great when the news eventually came out. According to the Press Bureau, "the British forces were engaged all day Sunday and after dark with the enemy in the neighbourhood of Mons and held their ground. . . ." It described the retreat in these words: "The British forces have reached their new position. Fighting has gone on more or less continuously, but the enemy has not effectively harassed our operations. . . . The casualties cannot be estimated exactly but are not heavy."

Two correspondents were close enough to the retreat to form a better idea of what had happened: Arthur Moore of *The Times* and Hamilton Fyfe of the other Northcliffe paper, the *Daily Mail*. Both were stunned by what they considered a major British defeat, and because of an unusual set of circumstances they succeeded in telling part of the story to the British public, thus marking the first breakthrough in the reporting of the war.

The story begins on the afternoon of Saturday, August 29. A courier arrived at *The Times*' foreign desk with a dispatch from Moore written earlier that day at Amiens. The foreign editor, Wickham Steed, read it with the acting editor, George Freeman. Both were shocked by Moore's report. "I read this afternoon in Amiens this morning's Paris papers," Moore wrote. "To me, knowing some portion of the truth, it seemed incredible that a great people should be so kept in ignorance of the situation which it had to face. . . . It is important that the nation should know and realise certain things. Bitter truths, but we can face them. We have to cut our losses, to take stock of the situation, to set our teeth." Moore went on to describe the rapidity of the German advance, the relentless pursuit, the broken British regiments, the men weak with hunger and exhaustion, the "great losses" the British Expeditionary Force had sustained. It was strong, emotional stuff and, since Moore was an experienced man, appeared likely to be true, but Steed and Freeman considered that it had no chance of passing the censor in its original form. So, despite a plea in the text of Moore's copy that the censor pass his dispatch in the national interest, they set about giving the message a preliminary censoring themselves. Then they sent it around by hand to the chief of the Press Bureau, F. E. Smith, already famous as a King's Counsel and later, as Lord Birkenhead, to become Lord Chancellor. Two hours passed before the dispatch came back, with a covering note signed by Smith: "I am sorry to have censored this most able and interesting message so freely, but the reasons are obvious. Forgive my clumsy journalistic suggestions, but I beg you to use the parts of this article which I have passed to enforce the lesson—reinforcements and reinforcements at once."

Steed and Freeman turned anxiously to Moore's dispatch and found, to their amazement, that not only had many of their deletions been restored by the printer's mark "stet" and the initials F. E. S., but that Smith had written in some phrases of his own actually strengthening Moore's conclusions. "[The BEF] has suffered terrible losses and requires immediate and immense reinforcement," wrote Smith, censor-turned-war-correspondent. "[It] has won indeed imperishable glory, but it needs men, men, and yet more men. . . . We want reinforcements and we want them now."

Steed and Freeman considered Smith's note tantamount to an order to publish, and so Moore's message duly appeared next morning, in the special Sunday edition of *The Times*, under the headline BROKEN BRITISH REGIMENTS BATTLING AGAINST ODDS. Beside it appeared another dispatch, reprinted from that day's *Weekly Dispatch*, Northcliffe's Sunday paper. This was headlined GERMAN TIDAL WAVE — OUR SOLDIERS OVERWHELMED BY NUMBERS and was written by Moore's colleague Hamilton Fyfe. It, too,

bore the touch of F. E. Smith: "England should realise and realise at once that she must send reinforcements and still send them. . . . We want men and we want them now."

Here was a clear case of a politician using his powers as censor to push his own views. As far as the two correspondents and their papers were concerned, this could have been overlooked in their satisfaction of at least getting their message printed, if it had not been for Smith's next move.

On Monday the storm broke. There was considerable public alarm. *The Times* and the *Dispatch* were denounced in Parliament and in other newspapers for "catch-penny" tactics. Smith could have set the whole matter straight, but to *The Times'* amazement he said little about his additions and nothing about his note. He merely hinted that he had been too busy to give proper time to considering the articles. The government had decided that the defeat at Mons, despite its possible appeal in a recruiting drive, was not the sort of news the British public should read, and Smith was busy back-pedalling to get into line. In the national interest *The Times* let him off lightly, publishing on Tuesday morning a short statement to the effect that Moore's dispatch had been printed not merely with the consent but at the request of the head of the Press Bureau. Within a few weeks Smith resigned from the bureau, and the whole sorry matter was forgotten in the tide of further disasters.[14]

While Moore and Hamilton Fyfe succeeded in revealing the Mons defeat, no one had any such luck with the Battle of the Frontiers. Between August 14 and 25, 1914, a German victory that wiped out about 300,000 French soldiers, or nearly 25 per cent of the combatants—a rate of wastage never equalled in the rest of the fighting on any front—remained *completely unreported in Britain until after the war was over.* Yet there was a war correspondent with the French army at the time, Gerald Fitzgerald Campbell, representing *The Times.* Campbell must have known of the disaster, but not a single word about it appeared in his dispatches to his newspaper or even in his private letters to his editor. He ignored it completely, and in his book *Verdun to the Vosges,* published in 1916, he glossed over it. Even more surprisingly, *The Times* approved: "Such silence was prudent . . . had it been known in England that France had lost more than a quarter of a million men from her regular army in the first month of fighting, British determination must have been gravely weakened."[15]

The French felt the same. After the report that the French army had captured Mulhouse, in Alsace, on August 9, 1914, *nothing* further was published in French newspapers about the state of the war for nine crucial days. Rumours were optimistic: there were anti-war strikes and riots in Berlin; the Prussians were driving soldiers to fight at pistol point; soldiers from the German army were deserting in droves; one French soldier had frightened fifty Germans into surrendering. Then, on August 20, as the Germans pushed towards Paris, a stunned capital read in *Le Matin* the frightening headline ARE THEY AT BRUSSELS? By August 30, when, as *The Times'* Paris correspondent noted, "great preparations being made around Paris do not altogether reassure people here," the truth could no longer be concealed. The government prevented a collapse of civilian morale only by covering up the army's failure with stories of a dastardly German surprise attack.

Equally, nothing appeared in British or French newspapers about the annihilation of three Russian army corps at the Battle of Tannenberg, between August 26 and 31, 1914, presumably on the same grounds, that news of such a disaster to their Russian ally would dishearten the British and the French. The battle received some coverage in *The Times History of the War,* published in the spring of 1915, but, again, it was not until after the war that the full story emerged.[16]

German newspaper readers fared little better. A propaganda campaign, the theme of which was that Russia had mobilised first, the French had invaded German territory, and the envious English had seized the opportunity to crush a competitor whose commercial and naval superiority had to be forestalled, made the war generally acceptable. The high command fed the newspapers streams of stories about German advances, captured soldiers, captured guns, captured flags. The fall of Paris, in that early period of delirium, was said to be only a matter of days.

In Belgium and France, Philip Gibbs and his colleagues battled on. They set out for towns the Germans had already taken. They escaped from others only hours before the Germans arrived. Gibbs switched to the Battle of the Marne and for the first time saw the Germans in retreat. This short extract from one of his dispatches captures the mood.

All day long on this Sunday in September I trudged over battlefields still littered with the horrors of recent fighting. . . . My comrade of this day was a grave digger. With other peasants enrolled for the same tragic task he had followed the line of battle for twenty kilometers from his own village, helping to bury the German corpses. . . . Dig as hard as he could, my friendly grave digger had been unable to cover up all those brothers in arms who lay out in the wind and the rain. . . . My guide grasped my arm and pointed to a dip in the ground beyond the abandoned village of Levignen. 'See there', he said, 'they take some time to burn'. He spoke in a matter of fact way, like a gardener pointing to a bonfire of autumn leaves. But there in line with his forefinger, rose a heavy rolling smoke, sluggish in the rain under a leaden sky, and I knew that those leaves

yonder had fallen from the great tree of human life, and that this bonfire was made from an unnatural harvesting.[17]

Gibbs was getting his copy back to his office by any means he could, including, for a brief but glorious spell, a War Office messenger. Reasoning that the lower echelons of the War Office would not know of the official ban on war correspondents, he simply waylaid a War Office courier and ordered him to take an envelope back to London. The envelope was addressed "The *Daily Chronicle,* Care of the War Office — URGENT." When the envelope arrived in London, the War Office (until someone woke up to what was happening) duly ordered another messenger to rush it to the *Chronicle.*

But by early 1915 the net to prevent war correspondents from getting anywhere near the war was drawing tighter. Kitchener had put out orders for the arrest in France of a number of correspondents mentioned by name. Gibbs tried another ploy. He had himself appointed as a special commissioner of the Red Cross to report on field hospitals in France. At this stage, there were dozens of relief organisations across the Channel (including a group of women from the eastern counties of England—the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Service—who called themselves FANYS and were, naturally enough, known as "Fannies"), and Gibbs reasoned that one correspondent with the right papers could lose himself easily. He was arrested before he had even left the boat at Le Havre. Kept under open arrest for ten days, Gibbs was solemnly warned that Kitchener was *very* angry with him and that if he returned to France again he would be put against a wall and shot.

Obviously matters could not go on like this. The government was now under some pressure to make a few changes. There was no danger of anything slipping through that might create public criticism of the conduct of the war or depress the nation, because the Defence of the Realm Act could be used to manipulate the press to fall in with the government's wishes.* Not that most newspapers would need more than a light touch of the rein now and then, since they had already made it clear that they would back the war effort wholeheartedly. "Trust the generals," Lord Northcliffe said.

But the opinion that carried the most weight, and was probably responsible for persuading the Cabinet to accredit at least some war correspondents, came not from within Britain but from America. On January 22, 1915, in a little-known letter to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, the former American president Theodore Roosevelt said bluntly that the British government's refusal to allow war correspondents to pursue their tasks was harming Britain's cause in the United States. "There has been a very striking contrast between the lavish attention showered on war correspondents by the German military authorities and the point-blank refusal to have anything to do with them by the British and French governments . . . the only real war news, written by Americans who are known to and trusted by the American public comes from the German side.* If you think [American] public opinion should be taken into account, then it is worth your while considering whether much of your censorship work and much of your refusal to allow correspondents at the front has not been a danger to your cause from the standpoint of the effect on public opinion without any corresponding military gains."[18]

The Cabinet began to press the high command, and GHQ agreed to have a few "writing chappies" with the armies in the field. It spent weeks drawing up regulations to govern war correspondents and laying down rules of field censorship. Obviously, there could not be any mention of regiments by name, and no mention of places, either, except in the vaguest manner, and no "writing up" of any officers other than the commander-in-chief. But would it be safe to allow any mention of the weather? And who was to decide what would encourage recruiting and what might discourage it? These remained problems until the end of the war, but a rough rule-of-thumb was indicated by a remark of General J. V. Charteris, Chief of Intelligence, when asked by a correspondent how much of an action he would be allowed to report: "Say what you like, old man. But don't mention any places or people."[19] What it came down to in the end was that in the eyes of GHQ the ideal war correspondent would be one who wrote what he had been told was true, or even what he thought was true, but never what he knew to be true. Given these restrictions, the war correspondents might just as well have stayed in London.

Instead, they arrived at GHQ in June 1915, where they were greeted by the commander-in-chief, Sir John French, who was wearing his top boots and spurs. Sir John made a little speech saying he was pleased to welcome the correspondents to his army and that he trusted their honour and loyalty. The correspondents were: Philip Gibbs, representing the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Chronicle;* Percival Phillips, a deep thinker on war, who had been a correspondent since the age of twenty, and represented the *Daily Express* and the *Morning Post;* William Beach Thomas, a classics scholar, representing the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror;* H. Perry Robinson, the oldest of the team, who was fanatical about detail, representing *The Times* and the *Daily News;* Herbert Russell, representing the

* Churchill, in fact, recommended to Asquith that *The Times* be commandeered and converted into an official British gazette, which, he said, "would have afforded the administration a sure and authoritative means of guiding public opinion." Asquith ignored this advice.

* In an attempt to help win opinion in neutral countries to her cause, Germany had welcomed American correspondents and had given them every assistance.

Reuters news agency; and Basil Clarke, representing the Amalgamated Press. From time to time these numbers were swelled by H. W. Nevinson, Filson Young, Percival Gibbon, George Dewar, and H. M. Tomlinson, but this first group saw the war through to the end.

They were in officers' uniform, without badges or insignia of rank (although they had honorary status as captains), and wore a green band on the right arm. They were given an old house in the village of Tatinghein as their headquarters and were provided with orderlies, lorries, cars, conducting officers, and censors. Almost the first thing they learned was that, although GHQ had agreed to have them, they were by no means welcome. Lower-ranking regular officers were extremely hostile to the idea that there would be war correspondents "prying around" and "giving the whole show away." So they were to be allowed to go nowhere without a conducting officer, and it did not take long to learn that these officers had been discreetly instructed to waste the correspondents' time as much as possible. These travelling censors went wherever the correspondents went, lived with them, ate with them, read their dispatches, and even examined their private letters, with authority to use, if they considered it necessary, chemical tests to look for invisible ink. It was not a job they greatly enjoyed, coming, as they mostly did, from adventurous parts of the Empire and in expectation of greater glory than being conducting officers or censors. There was Colonel John Faunthorpe, cavalry officer, pig-sticker, tiger hunter, judge, and poet, open in his ridicule of journalism in general and war correspondents in particular. There was Hesketh Pritchard, big-game hunter, cricketer, all-round sportsman, and author of stirring books on Empire. Later there was Colonel the Honourable Neville Lytton, painter, musician, and diplomat, a man who valued "form" above all else. This elegant, intelligent, but insensitive officer spent his leisure time at the front playing Bach on an eighteenth-century ivory flute and doing remarkable imitations of the noise ducks make when lapping up weeds on a pond. And there was Colonel Hutton Wilson, a debonair staff officer, who became thoroughly convinced that war correspondents, "even *The Times* man, by God," were all Bolsheviks.

The correspondents soon settled down into a routine. On the day that an attack was scheduled, they drew lots to see who would cover which area. Each then set out in his chauffeur-driven car, accompanied by his conducting officer. They went as close to the front as possible, watched the preliminary bombardment, got into the backwash of prisoners and walking wounded, interviewed anyone they could, and tried to piece together a story. Back at their quarters, the correspondents held a meeting, and each man outlined the narrative part of his story, keeping any personal impressions for his own dispatch. They then retired to their own rooms, wrote their pieces, and submitted them to the waiting censors. What the censors left was given to a dispatch rider, who took the messages to Signals at GHQ, where they were telephoned to the War Office and sent from there by hand to the various newspaper offices. The War Office had no right to touch a message once it had been censored in France, and the newspapers were not allowed to alter or cut anything the correspondents wrote. Once they had appeared in Britain, the dispatches were distributed throughout the Empire, under the direction of the Newspaper Proprietors' Association.

It was a routine designed with two ostensible ends in view: to enable the public to have a picture of its army at the front, but at the same time to prevent the publication of any information that might be of use to the enemy. But, of course, these were not the real aims. The real aims were, first, to provide colourful stories of heroism and glory calculated to sustain enthusiasm for the war and ensure a supply of recruits for the front and, second, to cover any mistakes the high command might make, preserve it from criticism in its conduct of the war, and safeguard the reputations of its generals. The smarter war correspondents realised this very early on, but for various reasons decided not to confront the system. Some hoped that as the war progressed things would change. Some thought that the high command had the right idea. Others were worried about the reaction of their editors. Had the correspondents had the moral courage to refuse to play their part in the charade, the government might have been forced to reconsider its attitude. (On one occasion, all the correspondents went on strike because of the excessive repression of one censor and won their case.) But they went along with the system, grumbling sometimes, it is true, but saving their protests for the memoirs they published after the war, when it was too late. The justifications and rationalisations they offered, both at the time and later, for permitting themselves to serve as propagandists, to be used in a manner that allowed nothing of the real picture of the war on the Western Front to emerge, go a long way towards explaining why, as one historian said, "there was no more discreditable period in the history of journalism than the four years of the Great War."[20]

Sir Philip Gibbs wrote, in 1923: "We identified ourselves absolutely with the Armies in the field. . . . We wiped out of our minds all thought of personal scoops and all temptation to write one word which would make the task of officers and men more difficult or dangerous. There was no need of censorship of our despatches. We were our own censors."[21]

Naturally, *The Times*, above all other newspapers, approved this view: "Throughout the war the commentators of *The Times* could seldom be anything but *laudatores temporis acti*. They felt that their task was to sustain the morale of the nation in mortal combat; therefore they praised victories no less highly than they deserved; in stalemates they found elements of advantage; and defeats they minimised, excused, or ignored."[22]

Once they realised that the war correspondents were on their side, the attitude of the GHQ staff began to change. Some of the officers actually came to like some correspondents and to treat them, as the Honourable

Neville Lytton said, "as officers, *i.e.*, with complete confidence and trust." But the closeness of this relationship between the staff and correspondents was disastrous to the correspondents' work. If the staff was their friend, their confidant, their censor, then how could they write about it when it failed? For their part in keeping quiet, the six major correspondents were received by King George V when he visited the front, were met on the great bridge over the Rhine by Haig, the commander-in-chief, who made a little speech of praise and thanks, and finally, at the war's end, were offered knighthoods. Gibbs, the most sensitive of them, had occasional nagging doubts. After the slaughter at Loos in September 1915, General G. M. W. Macdonough, of Army Intelligence, personally cut forty pages from Gibbs' story. The idea appeared to be, Gibbs said, to conceal the truth not from the enemy but from the nation, "in defence of the British High Command and its tragic blundering."

It is instructive to compare a soldier's description of trench warfare with what the correspondents sent. The French Socialist author René Naegelen wrote, after the war:

> Three of us were crouching in a hole under the barrage of artillery fire. Then a flame, a blast; then darkness and smoke, the acrid smell of gunpowder. Was I killed or wounded? I cautiously moved my arms and legs. Nothing. My two friends, however, lying one upon the other, were bleeding. The bowels of one were oozing out. The other had a broken leg; there was a red spot spreading on his breast, and he was rolling his panic-stricken eyes. He looked at me silently, imploringly; then unconsciously he unbuttoned his trousers and died urinating on the gaping wound of his comrade.[23]

The correspondents preferred lines of stalwart soldiers burning to go like greyhounds on the leash, impatient to leap out of the trenches and charge from shell-hole to shell-hole, from cheer to cheer. C. E. Montague, an assistant editor of the *Manchester Guardian,* first a soldier, then a censor, was caustically critical of the correspondents.

> They would visit the front now and then, as many staff officers did, but it could only be as afternoon callers from one of the many mansions of GHQ, that haven of security and comfort. When autumn twilight came down on the haggard trench world, of which they caught a quiet noon-day glimpse, they would be speeding west in Vauxhall cars to lighted chateaux. . . . The average war correspondent--there were golden exceptions--insensibly acquired [a] cheerfulness in the face of vicarious torment and danger. In his work it came out at times in a certain jauntiness of tone that roused the fighting troops to fury against the writer. Through his despatches there ran a brisk implication that the regimental officers and men enjoyed nothing better than 'going over the top'; that a battle was just a rough jovial picnic, that a fight never went on long enough for the men, that their only fear was lest the war should end this side of the Rhine. This, the men reflected, in helpless anger, was what people at home were offered as faithful accounts of what their friends in the field were thinking and suffering.[24]

Effects: people's perception of the press

The effect of this distortion was immense. The average Englishman had been accepting it all his life that if something was printed in the newspapers, then it was true. Now, in the biggest event of his life, he was able to check what the press said against what he knew to be the truth. He felt he had found the press out, and as a result he lost confidence in his newspapers, a confidence to this day never entirely recovered.

Photographers, too, were hamstrung. First, only two photographers, both army officers, had been assigned to cover the Western Front, and since their main task was considered to be that of compiling a historical record, not providing newspapers with material, none of their "realistic" photographs was released. The penalty for anyone else caught taking a photograph at the front was the firing squad.* If not photographers, then how about artists? Artists were not allowed to go to the front until 1916, when Charles Masterman, a former MP working in propaganda, convinced the War Office that some suitably softened sketches would improve his propaganda publications. Muirhead Bone was the first. He arrived in France in July 1916, and was followed by Eric Kennington, Francis Dodd, James McBey, William Orpen, Paul Nash, C. R. W. Nevinson, Adrian Hill, William Rothenstein, Wyndham Lewis, William Roberts, John Sargent, Stanley Spencer, and many others, so that by 1918 there were more than ninety of them. They were not much more successful than the war correspondents in presenting a true picture of the war. Paul Nash protested at the limitations placed on the artists—"I am not allowed to put dead men into my pictures because apparently they don't exist"—and, with Nevinson, appeared more moved than most by what he saw, saying, "I am no longer an artist. I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever. Feeble, inarticulate will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls."[25]

* One soldier risked it. F. A. Fyfe, a press photographer who had enlisted as a private, concealed a small camera in his bandolier and took a photograph of a dawn attack on German trenches.

It was but a small step from concealing conditions at the front to ignoring German victories. Retreats became strategic retirements, evacuations were rectifications of the line, and a defeat such as that at the Somme in July 1916—perhaps the most bloody defeat in Britain's history—brought only bland, innocuous reports, with nothing to show that the Allies had not had a good day, or even a victory. Gibbs, in fact, wrote in his dispatch: "It is, on balance, a good day for England and France. It is a day of promise in this war. . . ." Gibbs excused himself later with this explanation: "I have had to spare the feelings of men and women, who have sons and husbands still fighting in France."[26] Beach Thomas confessed after the war what had really happened about the correspondents' reports at the Somme. Just before the battle, the Chief of Intelligence, General Charteris, arrived at the correspondents' quarters and briefed them on the Allied plans. During the battle, dispatch riders came up at regular intervals with progress reports, and on the authority of these "we sent off in common a short cable message to say all went well for England and France." But, as Beach Thomas and the others quickly realised, the message was untrue, and the great part of the intelligence supplied to them had been utterly wrong and misleading. "I was thoroughly and deeply ashamed of what I had written," Beach Thomas confessed, "for the good reason that it was untrue . . . the vulgarity of enormous headlines and the enormity of one's own name did not lessen the shame."[27]

But an incident involving Keith Murdoch, a young Australian newspaperman, father of the present Fleet Street magnate Rupert Murdoch, shows that a determined correspondent could make his protest heard. Suspect though Murdoch's motives might have been, his report on the bungling at Gallipoli cost a general his job, contributed to the decision to abandon the campaign, and confirmed the opinion of the general staff that war correspondents were dangerous meddlers and that it had been a mistake ever to have imagined otherwise.

What happened was this: Murdoch, at the age of twenty-nine, was sent in August 1915 to London, to act as representative there for a group of Australian newspapers. It was arranged that he should stop in Cairo, en route to London, and report on the postal arrangements for the Australian troops. While in Cairo, Murdoch, who was anxious to visit the battlefront, wrote for permission to do so to General Sir Ian Hamilton, who was in command of the mixed force that had landed at Gallipoli in April to attack Constantinople and knock Turkey out of the war. Hamilton was reluctant to allow Murdoch to go. Everything had gone wrong at the front, and the British and the Anzacs (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) were hemmed into a few terrible areas of beach and hillside that were permanently under shell-fire. So Hamilton took the precaution of getting Murdoch to sign the war correspondent's declaration undertaking "not to attempt to correspond by any other route or by any other means than that officially sanctioned" and promising that for the duration of the war he would not "impart to anyone military information of a confidential nature . . . unless first submitted to the Chief Field Censor."[28]

Murdoch arrived on September 2, made a brief visit to the Anzac bridgehead, declined Hamilton's offer to provide him with transport to go anywhere and see anything, and then returned to GHQ, on the island of Imbros, and sought accommodation at the press camp. The camp, in an olive grove just outside Hamilton's headquarters, housed an interesting collection of war correspondents, including G. Ward Price of the *Daily Mail,* Charles Bean, the official Australian war correspondent, and Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett of the *Daily Telegraph,* the most interesting and dominating personality of them all. Ashmead-Bartlett had covered the Russo-Japanese War and was an experienced and highly competent correspondent. He appeared to have an unlimited expense account and used a large portion of it to purchase liquor from the navy. One of the sights of Imbros was the regular line of Greek porters staggering up the hill to the press camp loaded with supplies for Ashmead-Bartlett. He hated the restraints GHQ imposed upon him, especially that imposed by the censor, Captain William Maxwell, and had been fighting a losing battle, since the first landings, to try to tell the British public what was happening. Maxwell, on instructions from Hamilton, would allow no criticism of the conduct of the operation, no indication of set-backs or delays, and no mention of casualty figures; finally, he refused to give permission for any of Ashmead-Bartlett's messages to be transmitted until Hamilton's own official cables had reached London. This meant that, at a time when there was more interest in the fighting in France, Ashmead-Bartlett's Gallipoli dispatches, days late and heavily censored, often failed to appear in print.

Over the months, Ashmead-Bartlett had grown sour, hostile, and pessimistic. The Australians had arrested him in civilian clothes and had nearly shot him as an English-speaking Turkish spy; he had been torpedoed in the *Majestic;* and he was extremely unpopular with the young officers at GHQ because he was always predicting disaster. He was in the middle of one of his more despondent moods when Keith Murdoch arrived and fell quickly under his influence. Ashmead-Bartlett poured out to Murdoch's sympathetic ear all the frustration he had accumulated over his difficulties in filing stories, spun a gloomy description of the way the campaign was being conducted, and convinced Murdoch that a major disaster would occur during the winter unless the British government and the British people could be told the truth. Murdoch must have realised that almost by accident he was in possession of information that would certainly rank as one of the great stories of the war. He agreed with Ashmead-Bartlett that

the only way to get the story out would be to break the rules and get an uncensored dispatch back to Britain. Ashmead-Bartlett wrote it, and Murdoch set out to take it to London.

He got as far as Marseilles, but there was detained by a British officer with an escort and warned that he would be kept in custody until he handed over the letter. He had been betrayed to Hamilton by H. W. Nevinson, the correspondent for the *Guardian*. Nevinson had either overheard Ashmead-Bartlett and Murdoch talking or had been tipped off by one of the batmen, who, the correspondents suspected, was a spy for GHQ.[29] Hamilton, although at first amused by Murdoch's gall, had acted quickly. He had alerted the War Office, which arranged for Murdoch's arrest, and had then withdrawn Ashmead-Bartlett's accreditation and ordered him back to London. Murdoch went on to London and on September 23, 1915, sat down in a room in the office of the Australian high commissioner and dictated everything he could remember of Ashmead-Bartlett's dispatch and what Ashmead-Bartlett had told him during their all-night conversation. His account was in the form of a letter addressed to the Australian Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, but the presentation had strong journalistic overtones, with the data marshalled in a brisk and attractive way. It was an amazing document, a mixture of error, fact, exaggeration, prejudice, and the most sentimental patriotism, which made highly damaging charges against the British general staff and Hamilton, many of them untrue. But the basis of the charges—that the Gallipoli expedition was in danger of disaster—was correct, and Murdoch's action, questionable though it may have been, had resounding consequences.

Murdoch could see no solution to the problems of Gallipoli while Hamilton remained in command: "Undoubtedly the essential and first step to restore the morale of the shaken forces is to recall [Hamilton] and his Chief of Staff [Lieutenant General Sir W. P. Braithwaite], a man more cordially detested in our forces than Enver Pasha [the Turkish War Minister]. . . . It is not for me to judge Hamilton, but it is plain that when an Army has completely lost faith in its General, and he has on numerous occasions proved his weaknesses, only one thing can be done."[30]

These were obviously Ashmead-Bartlett's sentiments Murdoch was expressing, since Murdoch's visit had been too brief for him to reach so dogmatic a conclusion. Murdoch would no doubt have felt it necessary to check his accusations much more thoroughly had he ever imagined he was writing more than a private letter to his Prime Minister, and so it must have placed him in a rather awkward position when, three days later, Lloyd George, who opposed the Gallipoli campaign, read the letter and immediately urged that Murdoch send a copy of it to the British Prime Minister, Asquith. Murdoch could hardly have declined, but in a covering note he tried to tone down the virulence of his criticism.

Asquith used the weapon Murdoch sent him in an inexcusable manner. Without waiting until Kitchener had studied it, without checking its more outrageous allegations, and without even asking Hamilton for his comments, he had it printed as a state paper and circulated to the members of the Dardanelles Committee, which was in charge of the campaign. While the committee was still studying it, Ashmead-Bartlett arrived in London, and he and Murdoch began lobbying against Hamilton, Ashmead-Bartlett substantiating the substance of Murdoch's letter with an article of his own in the Sunday edition of *The Times*. This made it clear that they had Northcliffe's backing, and when the Dardanelles Committee met, on October 14, Hamilton's active career was brought to an end and Kitchener was deputed to break the news to him. The evacuation of Gallipoli began on December 12, 1915. A Royal Commission that began sitting in August 1916 (Murdoch and Ashmead-Bartlett both gave evidence) found that the campaign had been a mistake.*

Here what concerns us is that, although the war correspondents in Gallipoli faced the same difficulties over censorship and were subjected to the same pressures from the general staff as on the Western Front, one, Ashmead-Bartlett, helped by Keith Murdoch, succeeded in getting out a fresh eye-witness account of what was happening there. If the war correspondents in France had only been as enterprising, the war might not have continued on its ghastly course.

By 1917, the elation of the early war years on the British home front had given way to bitter apathy. Hardly a family in Britain numbered all its sons among the living. During the Battle of the Somme the casualty lists had lengthened to include entire divisions that had been virtually destroyed. The system of recruiting battalions from one locality meant that heavy casualties were often sustained by particular areas, and town after town went into mourning.† Inflation was climbing, the economic burden continued to be shared unequally, and big business continued to make huge profits.

Mutinies occurred in sixty-eight out of 112 divisions in the French army. A complete breakdown of morale was averted only by suspending offensives, condemning 629 men, and sending to the firing squad at least 50 innocent, brave, and experienced soldiers. A dreadful suspicion of the truth, of sacrifice unequally shared, began to spread throughout Britain and France.

* Hamilton was never asked to serve in the field again, but went on to another career, as an author; the shadow of Gallipoli—and what he regarded as a slanderous and unjust attack by Murdoch—remained with him until his death in 1947. Murdoch became an Australian newspaper magnate, a man of power, wealth, and influence, confidant of prime ministers, and a staunch Australian patriot until his death in 1952.

† It was worse in France, where the entire male population of whole towns and villages was virtually wiped out.

For the war to continue, it became necessary, as Robert Graves described it, "to make the English hate the Germans as they had never hated anyone before."[31] Propaganda was intensified. The atrocity story was re-employed to fortify the mind of the nation with proof of the depravity of the enemy, of his cruel and degenerate conduct of the war. Prominent people were pressed into service, taken on conducted tours of the front, and asked to do their bit to renew the nation's strength of purpose to win the war. A guest house was established near GHQ through which passed politicians, labour leaders, bishops, representatives of neutral countries, and distinguished writers. None of them saw much of the real thing, but they all seemed to enjoy the experience. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle turned up in the uniform of a county lieutenant so heavy with gold lace that colonels and brigadiers saluted him as he passed. George Bernard Shaw, invited at the suggestion of Philip Gibbs ("It seemed to me that Shaw of all men would be useful for propaganda, if the genius of his pen were inspired by the valour and endurance of our fighting men"), did a quick tour and offered a pragmatic view: "There is no need of censorship. While the war lasts we must be our own censors. All one's ideas of the war are divided into two planes of thought which never meet. One plane deals with the folly and wickedness of war. The other plane is the immediate necessity of beating the Boche."[32]

H. G. Wells performed best of all, employing emotive phrases like "Frankenstein Germany" and referring to the Germans' "intellectual inferiority." He turned his considerable talent to scourging the pacifists and tried to convince his readers that war was not as horrible as they had imagined. "I knew my chances of being hit by a bullet were infinitesimal, but I was extremely afraid of being hit by some too vivid impression. I was afraid that I might see some horribly wounded man or some decayed dead body that would so sear my memory and stamp such horror into me as to reduce me to a mere useless gibbering stop-the-war-at-any-price pacifist . . . but although I have had glimpses of much death and seen many wounded men, I have had no really horrible impressions at all. That side of the business has, I think, been overwritten."[33]

But now a reaction to atrocity stories set in. The man at the front, often the witness to the alleged atrocity, compared what he had seen with what he had read, and the result was a deep disillusionment with his country's honesty and a growing anger against war correspondents. (G. H. Mair of the *Sunday Chronicle* said later that by this time a soldier had "a very much larger detestation for the institution of war correspondent than he had even for the Staff.")[34] There was also an understandable reluctance to believe those few atrocity stories that *were* true. Henri Barby of *Le Journal,* Paris, and Edmund Candler of *The Times* both wrote horrifying stories about the atrocities the Turks were committing against the Armenians, but their detailed and damning accusations were lost in the welter of false and exaggerated propaganda of the period.

Even the most popular atrocity story of all—the German corpse factory—turned out to be another war correspondents' invention. This particular story had a long and highly successful run. It had several variations, but basically it was that close behind their front line the Germans had established factories for boiling down the corpses of their soldiers, from which to distill glycerine for munitions. *The Times* initiated the story, on April 16, 1917, with a suspiciously vague paragraph that said baldly: "One of the United States consuls, on leaving Germany in February, stated in Switzerland that the Germans were distilling glycerine from the bodies of their dead." The account quickly blossomed. *The Times* expanded the original report by reproducing a dispatch by a German correspondent, Karl Rosner, in which he referred to the German army's *Kadaververwertungsanstalt,* which *The Times* translated as "Corpse Exploitation Establishment." Foreign newspapers picked up the story. It appeared in *L'Indépendance* and *La Belge,* two Belgian newspapers published in France and Holland. French correspondents were instructed by their army authorities to send dispatches to their newspapers over their own signatures detailing what was known about the corpse factories. The matter came up in the House of Commons on April 30, when the Prime Minister was asked if he would make the story known as widely as possible in Egypt, India, and the East generally. A corpse-factory cartoon appeared in *Punch,* and in general the affair had world-wide circulation and considerable propaganda value.

The Germans protested in vain that the report was "loathsome and ridiculous" and that *The Times* had mistranslated Rosner's report, the word *Kadaver* not being used for a human body. In vain a British MP tried to get the government to clarify the matter. He said it was perfectly clear, from accounts published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and other leading German papers, that the factories were for boiling down the corpses of horses and other animals from the battlefield. Would the government therefore try to find out whether the story published in Britain was true or absolutely false? The government, of course, had no such intention. Lord Robert Cecil, Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, replied that the government knew no more than had been published, but "in view of other actions by German military authorities there is nothing incredible in the present charge against them"—a typical case of appearing to lend substance to the report without the responsibility of actually doing so.

Germany had to live with the accusation until 1925, when, according to an American newspaper report, Brigadier-General Charteris, who had been in charge of British military intelligence, first admitted that he had been responsible for starting the canard. Two photographs captured from German sources had turned up on his desk. One showed German corpses

being hauled away for burial behind the lines; the other showed dead horses on their way to a soap factory. Charteris, so the report said, told the guests at a private dinner party in New York that he had simply interchanged the captions and then, knowing the reverence of the Chinese for ancestors and the uncertainty of Chinese opinion towards the Germans, had sent the photographs to Shanghai for release, hoping the story would be "played back" to Europe. To support the story, what purported to be the diary of a German soldier had been forged, and it was planned to feed this to a British war correspondent with a passion for German diaries. The plan, General Charteris said, was never carried out, and the diary was now in the Imperial War Museum in London.*

On his return to England, Charteris denied his confession, which had been reported in the *New York Times,* and said he had not altered the captions on any photographs and had not been responsible for the fictitious diary. In fact, he said, when the diary had been submitted to GHQ in France it had been discovered to be fictitious and had been rejected. "I should be as interested as the general public to know what was the true origin of the *Kadaver* story."[35]

That the story was untrue was finally admitted officially on December 2, 1925. A statement in the House of Commons made it clear that there had never been any foundation for the story, and Germany was vindicated. Not that she was entirely innocent in such propaganda techniques herself. The German press abounded with stories of hospitals filled with German soldiers who had had their eyes gouged out. The *Weser Zeitung* reported that a ten-year-old boy had seen "a whole bucketful of soldiers' eyes," an atrocity story as old as the Crusades. *Die Zeit in Bild* ran an account of a French priest who wore around his neck a chain of rings taken from fingers he had cut off. The *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* said that Belgians gave German troops cigars filled with gunpowder. But these all appear to have been government-inspired propaganda stories, rather than, like the Courbeck Loo atrocity, deliberate pieces of invention by war correspondents.

The correspondent in question was Captain F. W. Wilson of the *Daily Mail,* who was in Brussels when war broke out. The first message from his office asked for an article on atrocities. Wilson said that he could find no evidence of atrocities, whereupon his office replied that a piece on refugees would do. As Wilson said later:

> There was a little town outside Brussels where one went to get dinner. I heard the Hun had been there. I suppose that there must have been a baby there. So I wrote a heart-rending story about the baby of Courbeck Loo being rescued from the Hun in the light of burning homesteads.

Wilson's story was a great success. The *Daily Mail* had thousands of letters offering to adopt the baby, and parcels of clothes, including a gift from Queen Alexandra, poured into its offices. So the *Daily Mail* instructed Wilson to send the baby to London. Wilson handled the situation with aplomb. "I arranged with the doctor that took care of refugees that the blessed baby died of some very contagious disease, so it couldn't even have a public burial. And we got Lady Northcliffe to start a crèche with all the baby clothes."[36]

The best French effort in this area of false atrocities concerned the Belgian-baby-without-hands. Although the story was started by a *Times* war correspondent in August 1914, it was refined and disseminated by the French. The *Times* man reported: "One man whom I did not see told an official of the Catholic Society that he had seen with his own eyes German soldiery chop off the arms of a baby which clung to its mother's skirts."[37] By 1915, the Bureau de la Presse, the French government propaganda unit, had produced a photograph of the handless baby, and on September 18, 1915, *La Rive Rouge* published it, later making the story even more lurid by carrying a drawing showing German soldiers eating the hands. No one asked how long a baby would live if its hands were hacked off. The Belgian prelate Cardinal Mercier held an enquiry, but he was unable to substantiate the story, and after the war a series of investigations failed to find a single case of this nature.

But by the time the atrocity story was discredited it had served its rôle. It had not only rallied opinion on the home front and strengthened the resolution of Britain and France to prosecute the war to a finish, but had also achieved the important task of lowering resistance to the war in the United States.

If war correspondents had not become part of the propaganda machine, if censorship had not been so complete, what could they have written? What were the great unwritten stories of the First World War? After the Battle of the Marne, each side began to grope for an open flank by successive side-steps, until by October 1914 the movement had come to rest by the sea and the trenches stretched from the Swiss frontier to the English Channel. A new and radical thinking on the art of warfare was necessary to break this deadlock. It was not forthcoming in Britain. "I don't know what is to be done," Kitchener said. "*This* isn't war."[38] And, in France, President Poincaré pointed out that "there really seems no reason why the Germans and ourselves should not stand facing one another for all eternity." The stalemate had caught the Allies unprepared, but, of course, this was not the story a war correspondent could write. Their edi-

* It may have been then, but it is not today. The museum believes that it was probably among a number of boxes of papers that military intelligence first lodged with the museum after the war and then, on second thought, took back again.

tors campaigned over the shortage of shells, but no one wrote that at the end of 1915 there were still 160,000 men in the line without arms, or that the Russians were short of no fewer than 1 million rifles.

While shells, arms, and ammunition were short, men were over-plentiful. On August 7, 1914, the day after Kitchener took office as Secretary for War, he issued his famous call for 1 million volunteers. Recruiting offices were overwhelmed, and recruits had to be billeted in shops and factories and trained in civilian clothes and with broom handles instead of rifles. There were not enough regular officers to spare for instructors' duties. One typical new battalion had three trained officers: a commanding officer of sixty-three who had retired before the Boer War, a subaltern with a broken leg, and a retired quartermaster who was totally deaf. But the French were demanding that Britain shoulder a larger burden of holding the line, and these new, raw, poorly trained divisions had to be committed. Some are said to have marched towards the front line baa-ing like sheep. The French, for their part, were equally free with soldiers' lives. Black troops from the French colonies were thrown into exposed positions in order to save white troops from slaughter, "attack fodder so numbed that they could not fix bayonets or throw hand grenades."[39] What stories these could have made!

And what of the staff officers, the men of the red badge, known later to the fighting troops as "the red badge of funk"? Scions of wealthy and aristocratic houses, they considered Kitchener's volunteer army to be made up of useless, shiftless men and treated them as such.* Generals, overwhelmed by the size of their forces, became increasingly sensitive to criticism and increasingly isolated from the men under their command. Secure in their headquarters, where a band played ragtime and light music during dinner, and where the diners were at one time served by little Waacs with the GHQ colours in bows in their hair,[40] most generals came to view the slaughter at the front with equanimity. This did not pass unnoticed, and by 1916 antagonism between staff and combat troops had become so bitter that at the front "a young staff officer with red tabs was like a red flag to battalion officers and men and they desired his death intensely."[41] For by that time a soldier in one of the better divisions could count on a maximum of three months' service without being killed or wounded, and the life expectancy for an officer at the front was down to five months in an ordinary regiment and six weeks in a crack one.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the British public—*and* the French *and* the German—did not know or understand the full extent of the casualties until after the war. Even today, many figures are still disputed. (The Germans began to fake their figures in 1916, and became so muddled by their own lies that the truth will probably never emerge.) In any case, the figures that are known defy real comprehension. Who can comprehend that half a million Frenchmen were lost in the first four months of war, 1 million lost by the end of 1915,[42] and 5 million by 1918? Who can imagine that the Allies lost 600,000 men in one battle, the Somme,[43] and the British more officers in the first few months than in all wars of the previous hundred years put together?

* The author Frank Richards writes of his commanding officer, "Buffalo Bill"—so called because he was always drawing his revolver and threatening to blow his men's brains out: "I never remember him having any favourites. He treated all the men the same way—like dirt."

At Stalingrad, in the Second World War, the Wehrmacht had 230,000 men in the field. The German *losses* at Verdun alone were 325,000 killed or wounded. For every British serviceman killed in the Second World War, three were killed in the First World War. The *Daily Mail*, on April 20, 1915, received from its Copenhagen correspondent the latest German casualty figures, which brought, after only eight months of war, the total number of German soldiers killed, wounded, and missing to *two and three quarters million*. The item was given one inch of space at the bottom of page five.

Casualty figures became debased and lost their real meaning. But there is evidence that, among the correspondents, Gibbs, at least, was aware of the magnitude of the killing. After the war, he wrote that the correspondents had seen more than most men of the wide sweep of war on the Western Front. "We saw the whole organisation of that great machine of slaughter . . . the effect of such a vision, year in, year out, can hardly be calculated in psychological effect unless a man has a mind like a sieve and a soul like a sink."[44] Why did he not write about it at the time?

Lloyd George, then Prime Minister, provides the answer. On December 28, 1917, he invited C. P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, to breakfast and told him: "I listened last night, at a dinner given to Philip Gibbs on his return from the front, to the most impressive and moving description from him of what the war in the West really means, that I have heard. Even an audience of hardened politicians and journalists was strongly affected. *If people really knew, the war would be stopped tomorrow.* But of course they don't know and can't know. *The correspondents don't write and the censorship would not pass the truth* [emphasis added]. . . . The thing is horrible beyond human nature to bear and I feel I can't go on with the bloody business: I would rather resign."[45] Here we have it in a nutshell: "The correspondents don't write and the censorship would not pass the truth." So the whole sordid conspiracy to keep the truth from the people was allowed to grow. *The Times* offers an explanation for this terrible failure of the war correspondents.

The first reason for the inadequacy of the [war] correspondents was that they did not themselves understand what was happening. Obstacles were not eventually put in their way of getting right up to the front line--provided

they did not try to go there when anything in particular was happening; no limits were placed on the people to whom they could talk--provided they did not talk to anyone who was busy! . . . Press officers directed their movements so closely that they hardly had any initiative in choosing where they should go. The man who came out from a spell in the line never wanted to describe what it was like. Even if correspondents did get any inkling of what conditions for the fighting soldier were really like, they were not necessarily encouraged to send them home: indeed such knowledge as was theirs inspired silence [emphasis added].* [46]

Only one correspondent did not remain silent, and his criticism was muted by his intense nationalism. This was Charles Bean, the official Australian war correspondent. Bean was concerned not so much with news as with a record of the war, for the official history he later wrote. Somewhat to the amazement of the British correspondents, he set himself the task of visiting, on the day of the battle or soon afterwards, every important trench or position occupied by Australian troops in Gallipoli and France. He accepted little second-hand information. "He regarded it as his bounden duty," Gibbs wrote, "to see everything with his own eyes." He became known by sight to almost every Australian soldier, not just as a correspondent, but as a civilian who was prepared to share their discomfort and their risks. Although he did not question the war itself, he did ask whether Britain was making the best use of Australian troops in seeking to win it. The British accused him of excessive partiality, but the chief censor agreed that "most of his criticisms of the Mother country were justified" and that he was motivated by "high-minded patriotism."[47]

The American entry into the war in April 1917 was the beginning of the end for Germany. The Allies would now have virtually unlimited manpower and supplies, while Germany, bled white of her men, felt, as well, the increasing grip of the Allied blockade. The threat of starvation grew day by day. There were bread riots in Vienna and strikes in Berlin, and the possibility of revolution overtaking Germany alarmed not only the German leaders but the Allies as well.

British correspondents saw only the military side to this German collapse. After the storming of the Hindenburg Line in September 1918, Gibbs wrote: "I saw the Second German Guards coming along in batches like companies, and after they had been put in barbed wire enclosures, they

* If *The Times* knew all this, then why did it not speak out, if not on behalf of all correspondents, then at least on behalf of its own? The answer, from *The Times*' own account, is a damning one: "A principal aim of the war policy of Printing House Square was to increase the flow of recruits. It was an aim that would get little help from accounts of what happened to recruits once they became soldiers."

laughed and clapped at the sight of other crowds of comrades coming down as prisoners. I thought then, something has broken in the German spirit."[48] The real story, however, was what was happening inside civilian Germany. Rumours of successful revolution, of communes of soldiers and workers running large parts of the country, began to circulate even before the Armistice on November 11. So while the British correspondents were being photographed in their cavalry-officer-style uniforms on the bridges over the Rhine and were receiving congratulations from the military for staying on side throughout the war, five American correspondents simply defied army orders and took off on their own into Germany.

They were Lincoln Eyre of the *New York World*, Herbert Corey of Associated Newspapers, Fred E. Smith of the *Chicago Tribune*, Cal Lyon of Newspaper Enterprise Association, and George Seldes of the Marshall Syndicate. After crossing the Moselle, they overtook a retreating German column and were threatened with arrest by the colonel in charge. But then they received the first indication that some of the rumours were true. An English-speaking German shouted a welcome on behalf of a newly formed communal organisation, the Soldiers and Workers Council, of Borg. The correspondents explained that they were on a mission to investigate the food situation, and the council gave them introductions to other communes, guaranteeing their safe-conduct. The council at Trier offered them transport, so the correspondents sent their army drivers back to Bar-le-Duc, the American press division headquarters, with a note to the press office saying that they had an opportunity to visit the interior of Germany and were taking advantage of it because it was "of the greatest importance at the present time that the world learned what was happening there"—a perfectly correct judgement. The letter created an uproar, and for a while the army even considered whether charges of treason could be preferred against the five correspondents, if they were ever found.

Oblivious to this, the correspondents reached Frankfurt, where, as the "American Food Mission," they were welcomed by the new government at a special dinner. From there they went to Kassel, where they were given an interview with Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, who received them reluctantly and only because the government ordered him to do so. They were met by Hindenburg's chief of staff, General Wilhelm Groener, whose head was bandaged. Prompted by his colleagues, Eyre, who spoke German, asked whether Groener had been wounded. He translated the reply: "The general says he has not been wounded. He says he has just lost a world war and has a headache."[49]

Now that they had their story, there arose the problem of how to get it back to their newspapers. The correspondents decided to split up. Seldes had run out of money, and this was not an occasion to borrow from his colleagues. In the lining of his coat he had sewn a twenty-dollar gold piece, in case of emergency. He now cut it out and began a four-day trek back to

Luxembourg, where he surrendered to the provost-marshal's guard and asked to be returned to press divisional headquarters. Eyre took a plane to Berlin; the others went by train. In Berlin, they were all picked up by the army and returned to the American press division. All five were now subjected to court-martial interrogation by the judge-advocate-general, who said that in his opinion they were guilty of violating the rules of war and the regulations concerning correspondents. He was still considering presenting a case against them when President Wilson's aide, Colonel House, wrote to Eyre expressing his unofficial view that an investigation into conditions in Germany by American correspondents would have interest and value for the people of the United States. This mollified the army, and the correspondents were restored to their former status and allowed to submit for censorship the stories they had gathered on their trip. But by now so much time had elapsed, and other correspondents had written so much about Germany under the Allied Army of Occupation, that the accounts of the five runaway correspondents were considered stale and were never printed.

The initiative shown by the American correspondents on this occasion and their courage in defying the military to chase what was clearly a story of considerable importance suggest that all the First World War correspondents were not like the British and the French. We now go back to see how the war was reported in its early stages by American and other neutral correspondents, and how the Americans fared when they, too, became involved.

ENTER AMERICA 1917-1918

Once lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street.

—President Woodrow Wilson, on April 1, 1917